

Remarks by Congressman Chet Holifield, Chairman
Joint Committee on Atomic Energy at Dedication
of Kerr-McGee Sequoyah Uranium Hexafluoride Facility
Oklahoma
April 20, 1970 *JP*

Governor Bartlett, Mr. McGee, Mr. Love, distinguished guests, visitors and friends, it is a great pleasure to me to be present at the Southern Interstate Nuclear Board's annual meeting and to join with you in the dedication of this important facility. The construction of this uranium processing facility is another indication of the vision Kerr-McGee has evidenced in leading the nation into the nuclear age.

I am most pleased to be in the district of my esteemed colleague and a most valued member of Congress, Ed Edmondson. He is a most important member of the great committees of Interior and of Public Works, and, most importantly to me, a distinguished member of the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy. It is most fitting and proper that Congressman Aspinall, the Chairman of the Interior Committee, and the present speaker, Chairman of the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy, be present today to pay our respects to our esteemed Committee member at this most significant event in Oklahoma's and our Nation's future in the atomic age.

Oklahoma and Kerr-McGee have a long record of leadership in the supply of energy for our great Nation. Oil, which has been the black gold of Oklahoma for so many years, will be even more important in the decades which follow. Oil, and gas, our highest grade of fossil energy fuels, must continue to supply important energy needs, particularly, for our transportation industry--land, sea and air--and I might add space. Oil is and will also continue to increase in importance in the petro-chemical industry. Of course, this Nation needs every energy source we can develop. We will have need for increasing amounts of all forms of energy fuels--coal, oil, gas, hydro and nuclear. The suppliers of fossil fuels are and will continue to be hard pressed to meet the ever-increasing demands that will be placed on them. In the long range however, it is obvious that we must depend more and more on nuclear energy to meet our needs.

This uranium hexafluoride facility Kerr-McGee is placing into operation provides a significant link in the nuclear energy chain. The addition of this technologically advanced facility is another example of the responsible leadership Kerr-McGee is providing in the energy supply field. The service this facility will provide is important to our Nation's future. This plant will also process material for foreign nations with which we have agreements to furnish nuclear fuel. I might add that the Atomic Energy Commission has already entered into uranium enriching service contracts with foreign nations for terms of up to 30 years, and their value totals \$401 million. Since the process to be performed here is the step preceding the Government enrichment process, these contracts will undoubtedly be a source of work at this

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facility. I understand that a contract has already been entered into with the Japanese to process material at this plant. I might add that the AEC also has contracts with domestic customers totaling \$544 million for uranium enrichment services which is an indication of the growing magnitude of the nuclear business. In fact the AEC estimates that in 5 to 10 years the uranium enrichment business will approach a billion dollars a year.

This Nation is deeply committed to nuclear energy for the future. The matter of long-term energy needs has been studied in depth. Much confusion has been injected into the long-range energy supply picture by reference to solar energy, magnetohydrodynamics, tidal power, etc. I think all avenues need to be pursued, and each may make an important contribution, but studies to date indicate rather clearly that, for our long-range basic energy needs, there appears to be no alternative to nuclear energy. I might add that there is a great concern by those in the know in the energy business about getting the next phase of the nuclear power development job done in time to meet our needs. I am referring to the development of the breeder reactor which must eventually take over the energy supply job if this country's needs are to be met. Here again Kerr-McGee's leadership should be mentioned. In addition to its role in the present generation of reactors, Kerr-McGee has built in this great state a nuclear fuel fabrication facility which can fabricate the type of fuel materials needed for the breeder reactor phase. I am referring to the plutonium-uranium fuel facility at the Cimarron facility near Oklahoma City.

Our Nation must be provided with major future increases in electrical energy for the health and welfare of our citizens. Estimates indicate that in the next decade we will have a need for twice the electrical generating capacity we now have, and by the year 2000 the experts estimate we must build an electrical power system of a capacity seven times that which is now serving the American people. More than half of all the people now alive will be customers for this energy in the year 2000.

Today, nuclear energy is only about 2% of the total electric generating capacity. Nuclear energy generating capacity must be and is being added at an ever increasing rate. One third of all generating plants ordered over the past four years has been nuclear. By 1980, it is estimated that nuclear energy will represent about one-half of all the electric generating capacity. But, between now and then--between here and there--is a road full of holes and obstructions that will interfere with the provision of electricity from all types of generating units--not only nuclear. Starting as early as this summer in some sections of this country, there may be some serious brown-outs and blackouts. Often from the best of intentions, pitfalls and roadblocks are being thrown into the path of utilities--investor-owned, municipally- and cooperatively-owned--seeking to build and operate generating facilities and to keep them fueled and perking.

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Look at the conventional fuel picture today. There is not only a shortage of low-sulfur coal, the type that minimizes the emission of sulfur oxides--an environmental polluting agent--but there is a shortage of all coal; supplies are very low. Gas is definitely in short supply. Oil is doing its best to supplement the central station fuels market. We've got enough nuclear fuel, but the construction and operation of nuclear facilities are being delayed for a number of reasons--including environmental concern.

The Joint Committee on Atomic Energy recently closed Part II of its very extensive and comprehensive hearings on the environmental effects of producing electric power. We tried to get on the open record all available information regarding the impact on the environment of all types of electric energy generating facilities--not just nuclear. We have compiled data and information bearing on the use of all available energy sources. In my closing statement as Chairman of the Joint Committee I said (and I quote):

"This committee has done its utmost and will continue to do so to provide a solid base of reliable information and data on which well-intentioned individuals and groups can mount well reasoned ideas, recommendations and conclusions respecting the dual need for safeguarding the environment and providing a sufficient amount of useful energy."

Please note that concluding clause--"the dual need for safeguarding the environment and providing a sufficient amount of useful energy." Look out for those who would sell the public on a single need. Unreasoning fear and confusion are being stimulated, increasingly, these days by a combination of well-meaning but misguided zealots, professional "stirrer uppers" for money or public spotlight, and assorted individual groups seeking to serve special, and often extremely narrow, interests irrespective of the adverse impact on the public and this country generally.

These people may well be a worse threat to this country than the past rate of environmental degradation--for two reasons: (1) They often distort the problem, and the problem must be fairly well understood if it is to be attacked intelligently, and (2) they interfere with the assembling and mounting of a comprehensive program to deal with the problem in the most effective way and from the overall standpoint of the best interests of all.

But, these apostles of fear and confusion are out selling, and they are persuading many people who are genuinely--and needfully--concerned about the quality of life.

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The members of the bodies of recognized scientific experts in the pertinent fields must stand up--and make themselves heard, understood and counted--when individual specialists in other fields sound off in public on matters outside their competence. Many of them lack more than scientific competence because they don't have that most precious attribute of all--for which no degrees are given--common sense! And the recognized scientists must also speak up promptly and clearly on those occasions--painful to them--when individuals from their own ranks of expertise step beyond the bounds of carefully, objectively acquired knowledge and sound scientific procedure to try to convince the public with opinions and so-called evidence that are rejected by their scientific peers. A hundred years ago, an American humorist said (and I quote): "It ain't what a man don't know that makes him a fool, but what he does know that ain't so."

My friends I am greatly concerned about pollution and the need to protect the quality of the environment. And there is an enormous fund of knowledge that we must yet acquire in order to attain a reasonable understanding of the inter-dependence of all forms of life and their relationship with the environment.

In 1965 I predicted that our citizens needed, and would demand, protection from the dangers of pollution to public health. In 1966 I stated in remarks before the Edison Electric Institute that the public would willingly pay more for services if the additional cost was for the improvement of health and living conditions. In 1966, in a speech at the 32nd Annual Southern Governors' Conference, I urged that the problems of pollution be attacked through a comprehensive, systematic program--rather than piecemeal. In 1967, I helped influence the decision by the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy to initiate an amendment to the Atomic Energy Act to enable AEC's uniquely endowed laboratories to perform work in health and safety fields--including environmental problems--irrespective of any nuclear relevancy. The amendment was enacted into law in late 1967, and these laboratories are engaged in important research and development activities in these areas.

Reason--the best we can marshal--including the engagement of our finest scientific talent--is urgently needed if we are to safeguard the environment and if we are to provide--as I believe we must--a sufficient amount of useful energy. I firmly believe we can achieve both goals. We must strive for both. Energy is an indispensable key to civilized life and the advancement of homo sapiens. The plant we are dedicating here today--and Kerr-McGee's activities in the energy field--are important steps toward insuring that our energy needs will be met.

Before I close, I would like to make an announcement for the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy. I think it will be of interest to the membership of the Southern Interstate Nuclear Board. There have been several bills introduced in the 91st Congress to permit individual states to impose standards more restrictive than those imposed by the Atomic Energy Commission with respect to the discharge of radioactive effluents from nuclear power plants. As is well known, I have favored reposing in the Atomic Energy Commission the exclusive authority and responsibility for radiological health and safety, and the Atomic Energy Commission has been performing this function with great care--and with excellent results--in accordance with the guidelines provided by the Federal Radiation Council, a specially created statutory body.

I have been concerned that those who traditionally have been strong advocates for states' rights may not fully appreciate that the field of radiological health and safety, and the possible dangers involved and the safeguard measures that have to be devised and taken, are absolutely blind to state lines. Also, competent specialists in this most important field are limited.

I recognize that consistency, which once was counted a virtue, is these days often regarded by some as the quality of a stagnant mind. My own mind--as well as the collective mind of the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy--is--I assure you--far from stagnant. I want to take this opportunity to announce that in the near future, possibly toward the end of next month, the Committee plans to hold hearings on these bills and will give due consideration to their substance and theme.

In conclusion my friends, I wish to congratulate the Kerr-McGee Corporation for their enterprise and vision in investing in the future of atomic energy. I also want to express again my appreciation to the people of Oklahoma for sending Congressman Ed Edmondson to our Nation's Capitol to represent you, and to serve as a valued member of the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy.

Thank you.